

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

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FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1803

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 2579

/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 6389

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY SANA

AMEMBASSH TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L JIDDA 4886

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SA

SUBJECT: CHANGES IN SAUDI CABINET

REF: JIDDA 3581

SUMMARY: THERE IS HEIGHTNED EXPECTATION OF CABINET CHANGES AFTER THE BUDGET IS ANNOUNCED JULY 10; EVEN THE PRESS HAS MENTIONED THE LIKLIHOOD. IN REFTEL WE REPORTED THAT SOME FUNCTIONS OF THE FINANCE MINISTRY ARE LIKELY TO BE STRIPPED FROM IT AND DISTRIBUTED TO OTHER MINISTRIES. A NEW MINISTRY OR AGENCY MIGHT ALSO BE FORMED FROM THE PRESENT MUNICIPALITIES DIRECTORATE OF THE INTERIOR MINISTRY. MINISTERS RUMORED MOST
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LIKELY TO BE CHANGED INCLUDE HEALTH, INFORMATION, COM-

MUNICATIONS, COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, AND AGRICULTURE-- ESPECIALLY THE LAST TWO. VICE MINDEF PRINCE TURKI IS KNOWN TO BE HANKERING FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF HIS OWN MINISTRY BUT NONE OF THE SLOTS MOST LIKELY TO COME OPEN CAN MATCH HIS PRESENT JOB FOR POWER AND PREQS. VIRTUALLY NO CABINET CHANGES TOOK PLACE WHEN KHALID BECAME KING FOR THE SAKE OF AN APPEARANCE OF CONTINUITY AND STABILITY. SOME ADJUSTMENT OF PERSONALITIES IS NOW TO BE EXPECTED. WE EXPECT THAT THE MAIN THRUST OF ANY CHANGES WILL BE IN THE DIRECTION OF GREATER EFFICIENCY IN IMPLEMENTING DEVELOPMENT PLANS. END SUMMARY.

1. IN ITS ISSUE FOR JULY 3 THE QUITE NEW SAUDI WEEKLY MAGAZINE AL IQRA'S CARRIES AN UNUSUAL PIECE OF PREDICTIVE POLITICAL REPORTING. THE GIST OF THE SHORT ARTICLE IS THAT MINOR CABINET CHANGES ARE EXPECTED SHORTLY, PERHAPS WITHIN THE MONTH AND THAT THE CHANGES MIGHT INVOLVE THE SPLITTING OR REORGANIZATION OF SOME MINISTRIES. BY SAUDI ARABIAN STANDARDS, THIS IS ALMOST DARING REPORTING.

2. AS REPORTED REFTEL, SOME CABINET CHANGES ARE EXPECTED SOME TIME AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE BUDGET ON JULY 10. THERE IS LITTLE NEW HARD INFORMATION ON THE SUBJECT, BUT THE MOST PERSISTENT RUMORS OF CHANGE CONCERN THE FOLLOWING MINISTERS: HEALTH, ABDULAZIZ AL KHUWAYTER; INFORMATION, IBRAHIM ABDULLAH AL ANQARI; COMMUNICATIONS, MOHAMMED OMAR TAWFIQ; COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, MOHAMMED AL AWADI; AGRICULTURE AND WATER, HASSAN MISHARI. THE LAST TWO ARE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED AS DUE FOR A CHANGE. MISHARI IS REPORTEDLY TIRED AND LOOKING FORWARD TO BEING RELIEVED AFTER MORE THAN A DOZEN YEARS IN THE JOB.

3. AS NOTED REFTEL, THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE IS THE PRIME TARGET FOR A REORGANIZATION WHICH WOULD STRIP IT OF SOME SOME PRESENT FUNCTIONS. IT IS UNCLEAR WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO MINFINANCE PRINCE MUSAID AND MINSTATE FOR FINANCIAL AFFAIRS ABA AL KHAYL. THE POSITIONS OF BOTH ARE RELATIVELY WEAKER THAN THEY WERE IN FAISAL'S DAY. ANOTHER MINISTRY WHERE CHANGE IS POSSIBLE IS INTERIOR. CONFIDENTIAL

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IT WOULD BE A FARILY SIMPLE OPERATION TO SEPARATE THE NOW VIRTUALLY AUTHONOMOUS DIRECTORATE OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS AND TURN IT INTO AN INDEPENDENT MINISTRY OR AGENCY. FROM THE STANDPOINT OF FUNCTION, IT WOULD MAKE SENSE.

4. THERE IS LESS INFORMATION AS TO WHO IS LIKELY TO BE NAMED TO HEAD MINISTRIES. VICE MINISTER OF DEFENSE TURKI BIN ABD AL-AZIZ IS A POSSIBLE CANDIDATE, BUT IT IS

PRESENTLY DIFFICULT TO SEE WHERE HE WOULD FIT. HE IS KNOWN TO BE CHAFFING IN HIS SUBORDINATE POSITION AT THE DEFENSE MINISTRY. MINDEF SULTAN, WHO IS ONE OF THE MOST ENERGETIC AND HARD-WORKING OF THE PRINCES SEEMS TO SENSE THIS AND GOES OUT OF HIS WAY TO LEAVE MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF THE MINISTRY TO TURKI. ONE OF THE DIFFICULTIES IN PICTURING TURKI IN A MINISTERIAL POSITION IS THAT NONE OF THOSE MOST LIKELY TO BECOME VACANT HAVE THE POWER AND PERQUISITES OF HIS PRESENT VICE-MINISTERIAL POSITION.

5. THE SAUDIS ARE NOT OVERLY FOND OF CHANGE AND APPROACH IT CAUTIOUSLY. TO SOME EXTENT THE LIKELY CABINET CHANGES WOULD BE AN ADMUSTMENT OF PERSONALITIES TO THE NEW KHALID-FAHD REGIME; THE CABINET REMAINED ALMOST AS IT WAS AFTER FAISAL'S ASSASSINATION. SOME CHANGE MIGHT HAVE TAKEN PLACE EARKLIER IF THE KINGDOM'S NEW RULERS WERE NOT SO INTENT ON EMPHASIZING CONTINUITY AND STABILITY IN THE POST-FAISAL PERIOD. FOR THE MOST PART THE CHANGES WILL BE DESIGNED TO GIVE THE SAG AN INCREASED CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. THE CHANGES MAY BE ACCOMPANIED BY A NEW STYLE OF OPERATION IN SOME AREAS, BUT ARE UNLIKELY TO BE ACCOMPANIED IMMEDIATELY BY ANY BASIC CHANGES IN FOREIGN OR DOMESTIC POLICY.
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